

Visit Florida provides a good return: report

A state report says Visit Florida provides a good return on investment, even as the tourism-marketing agency faced years of efforts by House leaders to shut it down.

Florida took in \$3.27 for every dollar the state spent on tourism marketing over a three-year period, before cuts in funding for the agency and before COVID-19 sent the travel and leisure industries into a tailspin, according to the report released Monday by the Legislature's Office of Economic & Demographic Research.

The return over three fiscal years that started July 1, 2016, was more than in the three preceding fiscal years, the economic research staff determined.

It helped that the state, with 1,350 miles of sunny shoreline and a variety of theme parks, was experiencing year-after-year tourism records, while lawmakers provided a "limited increase" in funding.

The research office found the estimated return, up from \$2.15 per dollar in the prior three-year period, "is reflective of Visit Florida's return in periods of strong tourism growth and state investments at their current levels."

The report estimates Visit Florida from fiscal year 2016-2017 to fiscal year 2018-2019 helped generate \$744.64 million in state revenue. *— tampabay.com*



Photo courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society
J.W. Robinson Department Store (1958) in Palm Springs was designed by Pereira & Luckman.

Longtime Palm Springs visitor creates app that shows off its Mid-century Modern flair

Erin Lawrence, a journalist and TV producer, has been visiting the Greater Palm Springs area a couple times a year for two decades, and now she's sharing her knowledge and passion for the area in five downloadable driving tours.

"When you find a place you really love and feels like home," she says, "you want to share it."

To that end, she and husband, Roger Kingkade, launched Modern Tours Palm Springs, which offers five tours available for download:

- Modern Architecture 101 leads to hidden gems, such as the J.W. Robinson Department Store, Ship of the Desert, and the Schwartz Residence.
- Modernism Top 10, perfect if you have limited time to tour, includes

a stop at Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House and E. Stewart Williams' Edris House.

- Celebrity Home stops by the properties of the stars, from Frank Sinatra to Leonardo DiCaprio.
- Palm Springs Door Tour is a 60-page-book loaded with photos and addresses of cool doors and modernist facades around town.
- Seriously Selfie Tour leads you to only-in-Palm Springs backdrops for your next round of Instagram posts.

"We've always loved the desert and wanted to live there," says Lawrence, who writes about the destination for the Greater Palm Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau and Visit Palm Springs.

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Palm Springs tours

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“I started going out on my own to explore and look for unique houses, and I learned about why it was I liked them so much. I learned about midcentury modernism. I started coming down with friends to check out the houses and was always trying to get people to into the homes and architecture of Palm Springs.”

Two years ago, she and Kingkade decided to relocate — although they haven’t yet moved — and started thinking about what they’d do when they settled in here. That’s when the idea struck to create a tour company.

They were setting up the business when COVID-19 shut down tourism and the rest of the economy. Their vision for in-person experiences went dark, but Kingkade, a former radio personality who now operates a golf marketing company, handles the technical side of their fledgling business and knew how to create a satisfying driving tour.

“The tour is a hybrid experience,” Lawrence says. “You get to be in front of all these homes — minus a guide. Integrated mapping leads you to your stops. When you get there, you press play, and there’s a narration component that runs 2 to 5 minutes plus photos and historical documents. You can finish the audio, get out of the car, and take pictures — but not too close; we tell people to stay in public spaces.”

The tours can be found here: moderntourspalmsprings.com. Prices range from \$3.99 to \$49.99

— palmspringslife.com



buffalotracedistillery.com

Buffalo Trace Distillery’s live videos reached more than 3.6 million viewers

Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced distillery visitor centers and tasting rooms to close since March 2020, producers have sought new ways of engaging fans with their products.

Buffalo Trace in Frankfort, Ky., has live-streamed the Whiskey Wednesday program across social media since May 13. The debut program received almost 30,000 viewers, which grew to 200,000 on July 22. On average, 165,000 viewers tuned into the program each week.

The unscripted live program is either hosted by master distiller Harlen Wheatley, or Bourbon Hall of Fame tour guide Freddie Johnson. Each episode offers viewers behind-the-scenes access, insights and live Bourbon tastings. The interactive show also allows fans to participate, by commenting and asking questions online.

“Whiskey Wednesday has given our fans and visitors a connection to us, and allowed us to connect with them, in a time when personal connections are more challenging,” Wheatley said.

“If people can’t travel to the distillery in person, what better way to tour or enjoy a bourbon tasting with us from wherever you are. We’re grateful to our fans for watching and interacting.”

Future Whiskey Wednesday episodes are planned for 2021 and will include more bourbon tastings, trivia and special guests. Whiskey Wednesday airs live at 2 p.m. EST across social media profiles for the distillery and its brands.

In addition to Whiskey Wednesday, fans can take a virtual tour of the distillery anytime on the Buffalo Trace website.

— thespiritsbusiness.com